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ABSTRACT

The widening mismatch between the skills of the work force and the skill demands of the workplace underlie the need for school restructuring. Within the categories of school-level, school-district, and state-level issues, a discussion about and suggestions for restructuring U.S. education in order to improve its productivity and student acquisition of higher order thinking skills comprise the crux of this document. Educational goals, tne structure of knowledge, instructional tasks and activities, instructional group size and composition, and instructional time are reviewed and analyzed as school-level issues. School district role, central office functions, the balance between centralized control and local autonomy, present and alternative governance structures, personnel policies and practices, and collective bargaining are analyzed within the rubric of school district issues. A discussion of state-level issues suggests setting educational goals, stimulating local innovation, and rethinking state accountability systems. In response to the educational challenges that schools face, fundamental changes in the way local districts and states operate will determine the way schools are structured, instruction is provided, and staff roles and responsibilities are defined. (24 references) (JAM)

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RESTRUCTURING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM: AGENDA FOR THE 1990s

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RESTRUCTURING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM: AGENDA FOR THE 1990s

BY
MICHAEL COHEN

RESULTS IN EDUCATION

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CENTER FOR POLICY RESEARCH
NATIONAL GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

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INTRODUCTION

Since the early part of the 1980s, education has been the dominant issue on state policy agendas. Since the enactment of Mississippi's Education Reform Act in 1982, virtually every state has substantially increased funding for education and, at the same time, enacted new policies, programs, and regulations to raise performance standards for students, teachers, and schools. Yet despite these efforts, the need for education reform continues, and the work of the recent past must be extended into the future. This is because American society is undergoing profound changes, largely as a result of the combined effects of demographic changes affecting families, the workforce, and the schools, as well as changes in America's competitive position in the world economy.

This has been the fundamental message of reports issued in 1986 by both the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy and the National Governors' Association. Both Carnegie and NGA start with the recognition that the education system must continue to adapt to changes in the broader social and economic environment. More specifically, the need for continued education reform is rooted in three inescapable realities. First, the economic well-being of the states and their citizens is increasingly dependent upon a well-educated and highly skilled workforce. Second, the health of our economy as well as the stability of our democracy requires schools and colleges to effectively educate *all* students. The continuing high proportions of students at risk of academic failure deprives our economy of needed manpower, and threatens our democratic institutions. As a result of academic failure, far too many of our citizens are condemned to unproductive and unfulfilling lives. Third, public education is a big public business. On the average, states invest approximately 37 percent of their annual budgets in education and fund slightly more than 50 percent of the costs of elementary and secondary education. With a commitment of resources on this scale, and in light of competing demands for scarce state resources, improving both the efficiency and the productivity of the education system must be a continuing concern for Governors and other state policymakers.

In the early part of the decade, state education reform initiatives focused on raising performance standards and providing the resources to achieve higher levels of performance. In many cases, the steps—such as increased high school graduation and testing requirements for students, competency testing and new evaluation requirements for teachers, and new accreditation standards for school districts—were intended primarily to boost the performance levels of the lowest achievers.

Although important, these initiatives have not completed the task. In fact, it is just the beginning. Efforts must go well beyond raising the floor of educational performance. The ceiling of educational accomplishment must also be raised. At the same time, there must be a significant increase in the proportion of students, from all backgrounds, who are performing at or near the highest level.

THE CHALLENGE FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

The challenges facing the education system today are fundamentally different than those addressed before, even in recent years. As recently as a decade ago, the overriding demand on schools was to increase the number of students who mastered basic skills such as reading and computing. In the future, maintaining a high standard of living will increasingly require a workforce with greater intellectual competence and flexibility. These traits must be broadly distributed throughout the workforce; they will be important for line workers as well as for senior-level managers and executives.

More specifically, students will need a substantial knowledge base as well as higher order cognitive skills. Such skills include the ability to communicate complex ideas, to analyze and solve complex problems, to identify order and find direction in an ambiguous and uncertain environment, and to think and reason abstractly. Because workers in the future will experience rapid changes in both work technologies and jobs themselves, students also will be required to develop the capacity to learn new skills and tasks quickly. This will require a thorough understanding of the subject matter and an ability to apply this knowledge in creative and imaginative ways, in novel contexts, and in collaboration with others.

Even dramatic improvements in the proportion of students who master routine basic skills can only result in a widening mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the skill demands of the workplace. Consequently, the demand on schools is now shifting from simply increasing the number of graduates with basic skills to increasing both the proportion of students who graduate and improving the intellectual capabilities of graduates.

Currently, only a small percentage of high school graduates have acquired and mastered the knowledge and higher order skills they will need. Because most high school graduates acquire only a rudimentary set of basic reading and computation skills, they are ill equipped to handle even moderately complex tasks in the workplace. For example, the 1984 National Assessment of Educational Progress showed that slightly more than 60 percent of 17-year-old students lack

the ability to find, understand, summarize, and explain relatively complicated information, including information about topics they study in school. Often, they do not have the reading comprehension skills needed in higher education or business environments. The same assessment showed that typically only 15 percent to 25 percent of eleventh graders could respond adequately to a writing task, depending upon the nature of the particular task. The overwhelming majority of eleventh graders could not write a brief passage well enough to accomplish their writing objective.

While these low average performance levels are distressing enough, they mask large and persistent achievement gaps among subgroups of students. Students who are black or Hispanic, or who come from poor families or rural or disadvantaged urban areas, consistently perform less well than do others. For example, the average reading proficiency of black and Hispanic 17-year-old students is roughly the same as that of 13-year-old white students. And though some 45 percent of white 17-year-olds have acquired adept reading skills, the same is true for only 16 percent to 20 percent of black and Hispanic students.

Further, roughly 15 percent to 20 percent of 18- to 19-year-olds nationally (and nearly 40 percent in some urban areas) have not completed high school, and presumably are considerably less skilled than most of their age cohort. These dropouts are drawn disproportionately from the ranks of poor and minority youngsters. This suggests that the achievement gaps between minority and majority youth are even larger when the entire cohort of school-age youth, rather than just current students, is considered.

These achievement gaps are not new; they have been of concern for some time. What gives this issue more urgency today is that the percentage of students who are at risk of poor academic performance or dropping out altogether – those drawn from poor and minority backgrounds – represent an increasing share of both the school population and our future workforce. Thus, society cannot continue to write off this segment of the population; the future well-being of this country is fundamentally dependent upon their educational success.

In short, the nature, level, and distribution of student outcomes must change significantly. The holding power of schools must improve so virtually all students at least complete high school. The proportion of students who master higher order thinking skills must increase dramatically. In addition, it is not enough to raise the average performance levels; the proportion of students from poor and minority backgrounds who acquire higher order skills must increase substantially as well.

Further, the required gains in outcomes are proportionately greater than the likely increases in education expenditures, even if funding increases continue at the pace of the past several years. Since 1983-84, education expenditures have grown more than 25 percent. The state share of elementary and secondary expenditures now exceeds 50 percent nationally. Investments also must be made in early childhood, higher education, and worker retraining programs, among others, to respond to the same economic and demographic challenges.

Consequently, the productivity of the education system must increase dramatically. Schools need to educate more students to considerably higher levels of achievement, and need to use their resources more effectively in doing so.

RESTRUCTURING THE EDUCATION SYSTEM: CRITICAL ISSUES

Few would argue that so sweeping a challenge can be addressed adequately through incremental changes in schooling practices. Indeed, by calling for a fundamental restructuring of the education system in reports such as *A Nation Prepared, Time for Results,* and *Children in Need*, political, business, and education leaders have recognized that the traditional structure and organization of schools are not well suited for the new demands they face. Typical instructional arrangements are more appropriate for teaching students basic skills than for helping them acquire more complex cognitive skills. And, as presently organized, staffing arrangements and scheduling practices leave relatively little time for teachers to prepare for instruction, review student work, or engage in substantial and personalized interaction with students. There is even less time and opportunity to develop collegial working relations among faculty, which are important for both professional development and school improvement. Consequently, school improvement efforts initiated within the existing school structure, such as effective schools programs, may demonstrate some success in increasing basic reading and math skills, but they cannot approach the productivity gains ultimately required.

This section discusses specific issues at the school building, local school district, and state levels that must be addressed and resolved in order to move from the rhetoric to the reality of restructured schools.

Two key assumptions provide the starting point for the following analysis. First is the assumption that the primary rationale for restructuring schools lies in the need to improve the productivity of the education system in general, and, in particular, student acquisition of higher order thinking skills. It should be acknowledged, however, that others advocate restructuring schools primarily to enhance other values, namely either teacher professionalism or parental and student choice. In this analysis, those issues are treated largely as instrumental considerations rather than necessarily desirable ends. The extent to which either one is promoted is dependent upon the contribution it makes to the overriding goal of improving productivity.

The second assumption is that improving educational productivity requires a restructuring of the entire education system, and not just the schools. The structure and process of governance and control at the state and local levels must be adjusted in order to accommodate and support necessary changes in the organization and management of instruction in schools and classrooms. Accomplishing this first requires an analysis of needed changes in instruction, and then an examination up and through the education system to identify further changes at the school, district, and state levels that also must be made.

Currently, most discussions about restructuring schools involve some mix of ideas about greater school site management and autonomy, more flexibility and variability in the organization of schools, greater teacher participation in school decisionmaking, and the decentralization of decisionmaking and deregulation of schooling. While each of these ideas, and others, properly belong in a discussion of restructuring schools, rarely if ever are they grounded in any clear way to improved school productivity or student acquisition of skills. Until such connections are made, it will be difficult to build political or policy support for initiatives to restructure schools, and even more difficult to know how to go about the process.

School-Level Issues

Helping all students acquire higher order skills requires a curriculum that engages students in rigorous and challenging work. Particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are prone to academic failure and dropping out, the curriculum also must be structured to provide opportunities for frequent success, to enhance each student's sense of self-worth and competence. Further, schools must provide an environment in which students receive personal attention, so they feel that someone cares about them personally and consequently are able to form a positive attachment to the school.

The primary issues to be resolved at the school site level have to do with identifying structural and organizational features of schools that need to be altered in order to accomplish

this. Put somewhat differently, educators and policymakers alike need a map, or a vision, of what restructured schools might look like. This is especially critical when one considers that much of the work, and even more of the decisionmaking, that will go into restructuring schools will be done by educators at the school site level.

What features of schools need to be altered? A starting point are those conditions of instruction known to be related to student learning. These include educational goals, the structure of knowledge, instructional tasks and activities, instructional group size and composition, and instructional time.

Educational Goals. What students learn is at least partly a function of what schools are expected to teach them. To a considerable extent, instructional goals are determined by state and local school boards and the tests used to assess school and student performance. Because these measures continue to emphasize basic skills and minimize higher order skills, instructional goals and student learning will fall short of what is needed. Therefore, state and local school boards must establish clear goals reflecting higher order skills and invest in the development of assessment devices that both reflect and measure those goals.

Structure of Knowledge. The way knowledge is organized into school curricula has a significant impact on what students learn. For example, in many high school science courses, the curriculum emphasizes breadth of coverage in favor of depth of coverage. Consequently, students may be exposed to what are little more than vocabulary lessons in 34 different units of physics, rather than concentrating on a half dozen or so in a way that would enable them to learn how physicists approach and solve problems.

As another example, elementary reading instruction is typically organized around discrete skills for decoding, vocabulary, or comprehension. The assumption is that skills are hierarchical in nature, and the curriculum must first help students master the simpler "basic" skills before they proceed to acquire "higher order" skills. Therefore, youngsters who do not master the basic skills along with their peers are provided

remedial instruction, generally in the form of additional drill and practice in the basics.

A growing body of research in cognitive psychology and related fields suggests that this mode of operation may be quite flawed. In fact, studies demonstrate that skilled readers, even at the early elementary grades, are able to comprehend what they read not simply because they have acquired the basics, but because they intuitively and automatically rely on what we think of as higher order skills. As they read, they actively draw on their own knowledge, and ask questions and make inferences about the printed text. According to this emerging view, improving reading skills of poor readers requires far less in the way of drill and practice on the basics, and far more in the way of experiences that cultivate students' thinking and reasoning skills.

Instructional Tasks and Activities. To a considerable extent at the secondary level, and somewhat less in elementary grades, instruction takes the form of lecture and recitation during which an entire class is focused on the same content and engaged in the same activities. This method effectively forces all students to move through the curriculum at the same pace, regardless of differences in their rates of learning. It encourages teachers to use questioning strategies that emphasize brief and unambiguously correct answers, and limits student engagement in active learning. Alternative activity structures that emphasize student choice over a selection of activities or cooperative small group work on long-term projects can be more responsive to differences in student interests and achievement levels. At the same time they can provide opportunities for all students to become meaningfully engaged in reasonably complex and demanding learning tasks and gain practice working cooperatively with others.

Instructional Group Size and Composition. There is considerable evidence that student achievement is affected by the size and composition of each learning group. Grouping practices—class size, student assignment to classes, the creation of instructional groups within classes—make a difference in student achievement. This is also true of tracking practices in secondary schools. They determine the social environment

in which a student learns, the curriculum, the pace of instruction, and a host of other learning conditions. Further, the way instructional groups are typically formed in elementary schools—twenty-five students in a class, three to five ability groups per class—are neither the only forms of grouping nor necessarily the most effective. There is strong evidence that suggests that alternatives, such as heterogeneous groups combined with cooperative reward structures and peer tutoring, can work well. One can imagine a variety of arrangements that can be more effective, such as large lecture classes for some material, balanced by small group projects for other material; individual student work on computers or other technologies; or extensive use of peer tutoring, which creates instructional groups with only two students and capitalizes on rather than eliminates variation in student achievement and ability levels.

Instructional Time. Time is a critical structural feature of schooling. It is perhaps the most important instructional resource. As a structural feature, time defines the basic structure of schools and of instruction. The school year, the school day, the schedule, the curriculum, graduation requirements, and even the progression of students from one learning opportunity or setting to the next, are all defined by fixed blocks of time and set by state or local policy or regulation. Consequently, time is treated as a fixed resource. All students are expected to learn at the same rate and complete their learning at the same time. Yet we know that students learn at varying rates. Within classrooms, treating time as a fixed resource means that some students are routinely bored while waiting for their classmates to catch up. Others must move on to the next unit before mastering the current material. Inevitably, these students fall farther and farther behind their peers. Across courses and grade levels, treating time as a fixed resource means that some students experience the cumulative loss of opportunity to master needed skills. Consequently, by the time students complete or otherwise leave school, there is tremendous variability in their levels of knowledge and skills. In contrast to this are outcomes-based education and mastery learning, in which student performance standards are treated as fixed but the amount of time and number of opportunities students have to reach standards can vary.

This is not a complete list of instructional conditions that affect student learning, but it does illustrate several points. First, it is possible to identify key dimensions of the structure of instruction that affect pedagogical practice and student learning. Second, for each of these dimensions, there is a basis in research and experience that can serve as a starting point for the design and implementation of new structural arrangements. Third, it is virtually impossible to change just one component at a time; they are integrally related. Any substantial change to one requires – and permits – changes in the others at the same time. Therefore, improving school productivity and student learning demands that schools be restructured substantially.

Enough is known from the effective schools research to demonstrate that improvements in the technical features of the organization of instructional and other school resources are necessary but not sufficient steps to realize the desired gains in student achievement. Schools, after all, are social institutions, and their culture, norms, expectations, and mechanisms for involving teachers and students in their work are critical to their success. Further, circumstances among schools, even within a single district, vary considerably. Schools differ in their mix of students and staff, in the characteristics of the communities they serve and in their past attempts at innovation and improvement. From this point of view, schools require considerable autonomy to allow for the most sensible fit between particular forms of instructional organization and current practices, existing staff capabilities, and student and community needs. Therefore, inventing a new set of structural arrangements to be applied uniformly in all schools would not suffice. Rather, schools must be able to form and adjust their own structures and processes, as needed.

This approach has several implications. First, decisions about the most productive form of instructional organization need to be made close to the action by teachers and principals at the school site level. Second, if decisions about instructional organization are to be made at the site level, other related decisions must also be made at the site level. These include, for example, staffing arrangements, decisionmaking processes, staff and organizational development needs, and curriculum

selection and development. Allowing schools the leeway to make decisions in these areas requires that resources devoted to these activities are allocated to the school site as well.

New instructional and organizational arrangements will mean new roles for teachers and new staffing arrangements. For example, creating smaller instructional groups, variable time for student mastery and progress, or interdisciplinary curricula cannot readily be accomplished in schools in which the teacher's role is defined by sole responsibility for particular subject matter or large groups of students. Rather, these new instructional arrangements will require greater use of team teaching and other forms of collaboration and coordination. Similarly, increased planning, decisionmaking, professional development, and school improvement responsibilities for school staff also will require new roles for and frequent interaction among teachers.

It will be critical to find time for teachers to assume these new roles and responsibilities. This will not be easy within the current school structure. At present, schedules for teachers largely match the school day of students (though the teaching day is generally somewhat longer) and, despite the allotment of preparation time for teachers, rarely are there significant blocks of time during which teachers can interact with one another or with small numbers of students. Consequently, additional staff time, as well as new ways of organizing teachers' use of existing time, must be found. In all probability, some of this time can be obtained only with additional resources for more staff, for a longer school day or year, or both. However, it may also be possible to find more effective ways to use existing staff resources, such as preparation periods, inservice training time, or the time of administrators such as department chairs or assistant principals. Further, it will be important to look for ways to use less expensive resources, such as paraprofessionals, volunteers, peer tutors, and instructional technologies, whenever possible so each teacher's time can be used most productively.

School District Issues

The school district creates the context in which schools operate. In most instances, this context places primary emphasis throughout the system on the degree to which school practice complies with district policy. When the policies determine the allocation of instructional time, the amount of homework to be assigned, the number and length of teacher preparation periods, the curricular and instructional materials to be used, the number and timing of inservice days, and the like, some of the most important instructional decisions are being made at the district level. Teachers and building administrators then assume the role of implementing a set of procedures designed elsewhere.

At the heart of redefining the local district role should be a reorientation toward performance, rather than procedure, in which the district provides the enabling tools and resources, rather than the constraints. The primary orientation of school staff should be to make judgments about how to select, organize, and use available resources to achieve desired ends. In such an arrangement, interaction between the central office and individual schools would mainly focus on whether schools are achieving district goals, rather than whether they are following district guidelines.

Local district functions must be carefully examined and revised if needed change is to occur. The precise nature of these changes remains to be seen; it is reasonable to expect that new arrangements will differ widely depending upon district size and other characteristics. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify several broad issues that must be addressed by all school districts.

First, many functions typically performed at the central office level, on a uniform basis for all schools, should be either delegated to or shared with individual school buildings. In most districts, responsibility for goal setting, curriculum development, textbook selection, grouping and tracking policies, personnel policies, and resource allocation are typically lodged with the school board and are uniform across all schools within the district. Legal authority for such policy decisions appropriately belongs with the school board.

However, the standardization of these practices across all schools, without regard to variations in local building circumstances, is often incompatible with the discretion required at the school site in order to improve educational productivity. Consequently, districts and schools need to sort out which responsibilities and authority can be assigned to the individual school and which must remain at the central office level.

Moving in this direction will require districts to carefully balance competing pressures for centralized control and local autonomy. For example, though it is desirable for individual school buildings to have sufficient flexibility to select instructional materials well suited for their particular students and well matched to their instructional strategies, it is also desirable for students—especially in large districts—to be able to move from one neighborhood and school to another without finding entirely different textbooks and other instructional materials. Therefore, mechanisms will need to be established that both promote diversity and retain some common features among schools. Establishing districtwide goals and performance measures for which each building is accountable could be one such approach. However, developing assessment tools that faithfully reflect shared goals and, at the same time, permit varied curriculum materials will prove to be enormously difficult. Therefore, districts will have to consider a number of strategies and arrangements to assure the proper balance.

For example, schools could be responsible for establishing annual goals within the context of district goals. Schools could have the authority to determine their own instructional policies, to decide how best to group students for instruction, to organize instructional time, to select and use textbooks and other instructional materials, and to control the resources required to perform these functions. The local school board and central office, in turn, might require the school to submit annual goals and plans for accomplishing them. The district would be responsible for reviewing and approving the plans, for providing technical assistance and training to support the school planning process, for monitoring implementation, and for evaluating its effectiveness. This arrangement would require that responsibility, authority, and

resources move down in the system to the school building, with the district responsibility shifting to supporting and evaluating building efforts.

School decisionmaking and governance patterns must change as well. Creating greater discretion at the school site level also should involve broader participation in decisionmaking, so that both teachers and parents participate meaningfully in shaping the school's program.

As indicated above, giving teachers greater discretion with respect to the organization of instruction is a key component of school restructuring. This does not mean more autonomy for teachers behind the closed door of the classroom. Teachers are interdependent. In order for schools to be effective, teachers must make decisions collegially. This is especially true when the task involves creating more flexible instructional arrangements and new roles for school staff; these are decisions that must be worked out among the staff as a whole. The challenge for school districts is to create structures in which school-level decisionmaking can proceed effectively and efficiently, and in which teachers can play a significant role in administrative and management decisions that have important instructional consequences. At the same time, teachers must retain a primary focus on classroom teaching, so their energies are not dissipated trying to manage the entire school.

One of the primary benefits of school site discretion is the ability of the school, within the context of state and local goals, to shape a unique and coherent school mission and culture that responds to the needs of its particular clientele. Providing greater discretion and empowering teachers to make decisions at the school level requires that parents and community members also be given a greater voice in school decisionmaking. The issue here goes well beyond the benefits of parental involvement for the academic performance of their children. Rather, it recognizes that the public – especially but not exclusively parents – must have a way of shaping decisions over the focus and mission of a school. In public agencies such as schools, fundamental value questions are not appropriately resolved exclusively by the professional staff. While local

school boards have historically performed this function, their capacity to serve as the exclusive structure for lay participation will be diminished if a greater share of decisionmaking is moved from the school district to the individual school building.

Consequently, school districts will need to establish school-level governance structures, such as a school site councils composed of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. Districts must determine the scope of authority for these structures and help work out ways that increased professional participation and greater community involvement can be mutually reinforcing.

Greater school site autonomy and enhanced influence for teachers and parents are only part of the changes required in the school district role. When more autonomous schools take on truly distinctive cultures and orientations, both students and staff will need greater choice in the school they want to attend or the building in which they work. In this way, the appropriate match of staff strengths, client preferences and needs, and school mission can be achieved. Therefore, districts also may want to consider altering traditional practices for assigning students and staff to schools. Rather than assigning students based on where they live, districts could permit students and their parents to select the school of their choice. Similarly, staff also could have greater choice over the school in which they work, to permit a better fit between each teacher's own style, skills, and philosophy and the school in which they work. Greater choice for both students and staff should create more widespread commitment to and support for the school's mission.

The nature of local district personnel policies and practices must change as well. Internship and induction programs for beginning teachers must be established to provide support and help them master both classroom and schoolwide roles. Teacher evaluation systems, which currently assess how well teachers demonstrate specific behaviors and instructional practices, should instead focus on how well they are able to make appropriate instructional decisions and judgments in order to accomplish results with their students.

The role of the collective bargaining process in promoting school restructuring needs to be examined as well. Evidence on the impact of collective bargaining suggests that unions have served to increase the extent of bureaucratic control by making teaching work more rationalized, more highly specified and inspected, and by increasing the number and specificity of rules determining work roles and conditions. However, there are recent experiments, such as in Dade County, Florida, and Rochester, New York, in which the collective bargaining process has been used to promote greater flexibility at the school site. And in Toledo, Ohio, the teachers' union used the bargaining process to introduce rigorous peer review procedures in which senior teachers review and evaluate probationary teachers.

These are illustrative of the range of current policies and practices that will need to be reviewed in order to promote school restructuring. Equally important is a reconsideration of local control and leadership. Over the past decade and a half, local school board authority has been eroded as a result of federal legislation, court actions, collective bargaining agreements, and, most recently, state initiatives. And, as a recent study by the Institute for Education Leadership shows, local school boards frequently spend the bulk of their time on crisis management or operational details, and infrequently engage in systematic planning, policy development, or oversight. Generally, local school boards lack strong connections to local government, political cultures, and business and civic groups.

These conditions, together with the demands of restructuring schools, point to the need for developing new conceptions of local control and leadership. Successfully restructuring the education system and providing greater discretion to individual schools must occur in a policy framework that establishes long-range goals, attracts and retains high quality personnel, assures that resources are adequately targeted to students with greatest need, and generally makes success at the school site level possible. Further, it requires ongoing oversight and assessment to determine whether goals are being accomplished and policies are having their intended effect.

Strengthened local leadership involves more than a proactive policymaking approach. It also requires the development of mechanisms for strengthening ties to the local community and strong advocacy for education and youth. In addition, it requires the capacity to broaden the constituency and support base for education, promote widespread community understanding of the needs of the education system, marshal needed resources for the schools, and establish linkages with parents and members of the community at large to support and strengthen the instructional program.

State-Level Issues

Changes at the school and district levels will require changes at the state level in at least three broad areas: setting educational goals, stimulating local innovation, and rethinking state accountability systems.

Setting Educational Goals. States must assume larger responsibilities for setting educational goals and defining outcome standards. This is a critical precondition to providing greater discretion and flexibility at the local school site level. Accomplishing this will require state action on several fronts.

State boards of education can begin by establishing long-range educational goals that adequately reflect the knowledge and higher order skills graduates will need. Currently, few states seriously attempt to establish long-range educational goals. Historically, if educational goals were established at all, they were too vague to guide policy development or establish performance standards for schools and forgotten soon after they were established. In many states, descriptions of desired student outcomes either take the form of vague prescriptions for each youngster to reach their full potential, or highly specified and lengthy lists of instructional objectives reflecting subject matter course requirements. There must be a middle ground.

States should institute a long-range planning and goal-setting process, to establish educational goals to meet the broad societal needs schools must serve. Desired outcomes must focus educators' attention and efforts on teaching the most im-

portant knowledge and skills, while giving them the freedom to make curricular and instructional decisions about how best to accomplish these outcomes.

Setting appropriate goals is an important first step. However, in order to have an impact on educational practice, goals must be linked to state testing and assessment programs. In many states, this will require replacing existing minimum competency tests, which focus exclusively on basic skills, with newly developed instruments for assessing higher order skills.

In developing new assessment tools and procedures, several issues should be addressed. First, assessment systems can have powerful effects on curriculum and instruction, especially if student performance has such serious consequences as promotion or graduation. If tests are designed to be "taught to," as is the case with advanced placement tests, they can be powerful tools for shaping the local curriculum and making it more rigorous. They also can provide useful feedback to educators and incentives to students.

In order to work this way, the tests should be linked to a specific program of study, rather than assessing knowledge of a broad curricular domain. Further, tests must measure the depth of knowledge and higher order skills required of students. If they continue to reflect only minimum competencies, they are likely to restrict what teachers attempt to do and thus lower education standards and performance for all but the weakest students.

Second, assessment tools geared to higher order skills may take different forms than most existing state testing programs. Continued reliance on multiple choice or short answer questions is simply not adequate. Rather, assessment tools are needed that require students to synthesize, integrate, and apply knowledge and data to complex problems. They should present tasks for which no one answer is right, but for which a range of solutions may be possible. These may take the form of essays, projects, or other demonstrations of competence, such as those called for in Ted Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools. Scoring systems that rely on expert judgment rather than simply checking for the correct answer is an essential part of these assessment tools.

Third, while states should develop assessment tools that effectively shape local curriculum and student preparation, they should also seek to ensure that the same measures don't overly restrict local curricular choices and instructional approaches, or else the benefits of increased school site autonomy also will be restricted.

Fourth, states need to be wary of the danger that any particular outcome measure can have powerful and unintended effects on schooling by overly narrowing the focus of educators to only those outcomes that are measured. This danger can be mitigated in part by making sure that what is measured is truly valued, so attention is given to the most important educational outcomes. It also can be mitigated by developing a system of indicators that accurately reflect the multiple goals held for schools. Not only do we want *average* improvement gains, we also want to ensure substantial gains for the lowest achiever students. Although we want to improve cognitive skills, we also need to reduce the dropout rate. And not only do we value students' presence in schools, we also value their self-esteem, the degree of satisfaction they and their parents feel about their schools, and the willingness of students to pursue a variety of learning opportunities beyond formal schooling.

Stimulate Local Innovation. Improvement in education productivity and the professionalization of teaching will require new school structures that allow more varied instructional arrangements, greater collegial interaction among teachers, and greater teacher involvement in decisionmaking. Although the need for restructuring is clear, notions of how schools could be restructured are not yet well developed. New concepts for restructuring must come through carefully supported local efforts, where new ideas can emerge from and be tested against the realities of schools and classrooms. Consequently, states must provide leadership by:

- Articulating a vision of restructured schools;
- Encouraging local experimentation with various school structures;
- Reducing unnecessary administrative and regulatory barriers to experimentation with promising approaches;

- Providing ongoing implementation support and technical assistance to schools and districts trying new approaches;
- Linking rewards and sanctions for schools to their performance; and
- Researching and disseminating results to other schools.

In many states, this will require a significant upgrading of the state education agency's technical assistance and research capabilities.

Rethink State Accountability Systems. Successfully restructuring schools will require states to rethink the nature and mix of the accountability mechanisms upon which they rely. States will need to fashion systems that focus on educational outcomes and that provide strong incentives for improved results throughout the system by linking performance with tangible consequences in the form of rewards and sanctions.

Historically, states have regulated local educational practices largely by setting standards for inputs into the education system, e.g., per pupil expenditures, availability of instructional resources, staff qualifications, program offerings, and the like. States rarely attempted to influence directly the nature of educational practices by regulating teaching methods or curriculum content. Nor had they collected or used information on educational outcomes—student performance—as part of their regulatory or accountability system. With rare exception, states did not apply sanctions for failure to meet state standards, though they have had statutory authority to withhold funds or force consolidation for districts that did not comply. In short, states have relied on a set of bureaucratic regulations of educational inputs largely to provide legitimacy to an otherwise unregulated system.

Within the past decade, states have begun to tighten and strengthen their accountability strategies. Beginning in the mid-1970s, states have incorporated minimum competency testing into their policy frameworks. Thus, they began to specify and measure outcome standards. However, the standards were often set relatively low, focusing exclusively on basic skills performance. Typically, states did relatively little

beyond collecting and reporting test scores, relying on their publicity to stimulate and inform local improvement efforts.

Second, several states have begun recently to incorporate the findings of the effective schools research into their regulatory systems, establishing standards for such education practices as staff development, goal setting, principal leadership, and the like. Thus, in addition to regulating inputs and inspecting results, many states also have begun to regulate educational practice.

Third, there is renewed interest among states in developing appropriate sanctions for poor performance or noncompliance with state standards. For example, Arkansas linked its revised accreditation standards to school district consolidation, forcing school districts that failed to meet standards to dissolve and consolidate with a neighboring district. And both South Carolina and New Jersey have developed procedures for the state to intervene in the management and/or governance of local districts that fail to meet state standards. In New York State, schools with the lowest academic performance are required to participate in a school improvement program with state-sponsored technical assistance.

These developments in state accountability systems have occurred at a time when state attention has been focused largely on improving the quality of the lowest performing schools and districts in the state. In the past, state efforts were devoted to raising the floor of educational performance. As states turn their attention to raising the ceiling of educational performance, they will need to rethink their approach to holding schools and districts accountable. More specifically, they will need to address several broad issues.

First, states must link the accountability system to the assessment system, so accountability focuses primarily on how well schools produce desired results framed in terms of school goals.

Second, states must fashion systems that focus on both the school building and the school district simultaneously. Holding individual schools buildings accountable for performance recognizes that schools are the primary units for

providing instruction and the basic building blocks for reform. It is consistent with the overall call for promoting greater school site autonomy and acknowledges the often substantial differences in performance among schools within the same district. However, because schools operate under the resource constraints, direction, policy guidance, and support system of the local school district, accountability systems must be designed to hold both schools and districts accountable for their performance.

Third, states will need to set appropriate performance standards for schools. There are three different standards of comparison the state can use to judge the adequacy of school performance: absolute standards, comparative standards, or improvement standards.

When *absolute* standards are employed, the performance of each school or district is compared with some fixed, predetermined standards. For example, the state might require 85 percent of the students in every school to pass state tests, or it might set a goal of no greater than a 5 percent dropout rate for each school. Such an approach enables the accountability system to reflect state goals and targets equally throughout the system. However, it also means that the accountability system will serve largely to distinguish upper middle class schools from those serving predominantly poor students, since school performance and student body composition will be highly correlated.

In contrast, a *comparative* approach would judge a school's performance only against those serving similar student bodies. Such an approach offers several advantages. It is likely to be perceived as legitimate by educators, because it recognizes that socioeconomic and other resource factors influence school performance. Schools that serve predominantly poor and minority students will have opportunities for success, because they are essentially competing against one another. At the same time, it reduces the likelihood that schools serving more affluent students will be complacent, because they, too, will be measured against similar schools. Thus, the low-performing schools that seldom have opportunities to be recognized for success will find it possible to receive recog-

nition for their efforts. Schools in affluent communities, for whom recognition can often be a function of their clientele rather than their effectiveness, will be challenged by the efforts of other schools with equally advantaged student bodies. However, this approach also has some disadvantages. It sets lower standards for schools with large concentrations of poor students. If these standards remain low, ultimately it will work to the disadvantage of the most at-risk students.

When *improvement* standards are used, a school's performance is judged against its own previous performance. Any school that shows significant gains, regardless of its starting point, is viewed as successful and deserving of reward. This approach makes it possible for virtually all schools to be successful (except those at the very top with little room for additional improvement). It increases the likelihood that low-performing schools will be viewed as successful simply because progress is easier to achieve when one starts at the bottom.

These three standards of comparison are not mutually exclusive. Each offers unique advantages and disadvantages. If carefully combined, they ought to provide rewards for outstanding performance and powerful incentives for continued improvement throughout the system.

Fourth, once standards are set, states need to link rewards to performance. Although rewards may take a variety of forms, such as recognition or flexibility, there is reason to believe that discretionary dollars for the school building should be an important feature of any reward system. The reason is not that additional dollars will motivate school staff to work harder. Rather, additional resources can powerfully underscore both the intrinsic satisfaction and the external recognition that comes with success. In addition, the school's decision about the use of additional resources can foster shared problem solving among school staff.

Finally, for schools that persistently fail to show improvement or meet performance standards, states must develop appropriate forms of intervention. State intervention strategies may involve a sequence of steps, including requirements for schools and school districts to develop and implement im-

provement plans, providing assistance in the development and implementation of such plans, specifying the steps the school or district must take in order to meet standards, or ultimately, some more forceful intervention, such as consolidation or state takeover of the district.

In moving toward performance-oriented accountability systems, states will need to review existing approaches to regulating educational inputs and practices. Greater emphasis on outcomes and performance must be balanced with the value of input regulations for ensuring equality of educational opportunity, especially for students residing in rural, small, or poor districts. It also will need to be balanced against the potential of carefully crafted educational process and practice standards to effectively structure and inform local planning and school improvement efforts.

Beyond the need to sort out various regulatory arrangements, states also need to consider other possible accountability mechanisms. For example, a system that relies heavily on diversity and autonomy among local school sites can accommodate, if not capitalize on, market mechanisms of control. Although this approach can take a number of forms, the underlying principle involves providing opportunities to students and their parents to enroll in the school or educational program of their choice. The assumption here is that if enrollment and funding levels are linked, schools have an incentive to make themselves as attractive as possible. Variability in educational programs among schools can allow for careful matching between school and student preferences and needs, presumably boosting productivity in the process.

Another approach to accountability relies on professional mechanisms of control. A professional control model essentially turns decisions about appropriate educational practice to a self-regulating profession. It presumes that a well-developed knowledge base informs the training, certification, and evaluation of teachers, and that working conditions allow highly trained professionals to exercise judgment and employ the most appropriate instructional practices. One attraction of increased professional control is its potential to attract and retain highly talented individuals in the profession.

Within the education system, few mechanisms are already in place that can form the basis of a professional system of control. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, established by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, is intended to be such a mechanism. It will enable the profession to establish standards for the certification of high levels of teaching competence. There are proposals to create comparable boards at the state level for the licensure of beginning teachers as well. In most states, licensure responsibilities currently reside in lay state boards of education, which are expected to act on behalf of the broad public interest. States must carefully examine whether both licensure and certification ought to be determined by the profession or whether licensure more appropriately belongs in the hands of agents of the public.

To stimulate continuous school improvement, states must analyze carefully and determine the most appropriate mix of professional, market, outcome, process, and input systems of accountability. They also must develop an appropriate set of incentives and sanctions attached to accountability mechanisms. The task for states is not to select the single best approach. Rather, the fundamental task for states is to sort out which mix of control strategies, rewards, and sanctions will contribute most effectively to productivity improvements according to each particular state's circumstances.

CONCLUSION

The preceding analysis has argued that the challenges facing the education system are fundamentally different than those it has confronted in the past, largely because of significant changes in the economic and social fabric of the country. Responding to these new challenges will require a fundamental restructuring of schools, especially of the way instruction is provided and staff roles and responsibilities are defined. However, needed changes in schools cannot occur without corresponding changes in the way that local districts and states operate. States and districts alike must find ways to create a pervasive emphasis on performance and results throughout the education system. Local districts will need to find ways to shift greater decisionmaking authority and responsibility to the school site level to create mechanisms for enhanced professional and parental involvement in decisionmaking, and to provide resources and other forms of support and assistance to individual schools. States, in turn, must significantly strengthen their efforts to set educational goals and assess performance, to stimulate local diversity and experimentation, and to provide rewards and sanctions linked to school performance. Only by making concordant changes at the school, district, and state levels will the education system be able to respond to the challenges of the coming decade.

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